

Welcome to the new “Blythe Blast!”, providing you with City news direct from the source! It has been developed, in part, in response to the public’s request for more transparency in government and the City of Blythe certainly supports open and honest operations. The shenanigans that occurred in the City of Bell over a number of years have unfortunately cast a pall over all units of local government, however rest assured none of those transgressions are being committed in Blythe City government. The main reason we are even reading about them in the first place is because they are unique and isolated incidents.

This feature has also been developed simply to disseminate information regarding programs, projects, and actions of the City. It is not news to anyone that rumors run rampant in small towns such as ours and it will be in everyone’s best interest to know the facts. Our intent, therefore, is to “tell it like it is”, to quote a catch phrase of the 1960’s.

Rest assured that City employees are qualified, dedicated, and honest people and strive to do a good job. If you hear or read something that sounds odd to you, it probably is and is therefore more than likely just a rumor. Feel free to contact City Hall with any questions you may have about any subject with which the City deals.

This feature will be updated periodically as circumstances dictate. Please come back regularly and see what’s new!

September 28, 2011

RECAP OF CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 27, 2011

In addition to the more mundane and routine items approved by the City Council during last evening’s meeting, the Council also:

1. Authorized the City Manager to sign all documents relating to the Police Department’s efforts in pursuing a second Stonegarden grant in the amount of \$189,822. If awarded, the funds will be used for officer overtime, vehicle expenses, and a citywide video surveillance system.
2. Adopted a letter of support of HayDay Farms in the company’s attempts to re-lease farmland from the Metropolitan Water District.
3. Conducted the first reading of a new ordinance designed to address the inspection and permitting of pawnbrokers and secondhand shops.
4. Approved an Assignment Agreement approving the sale of Palo Verde Valley Disposal Service to CR&R, Inc. By approving the Agreement, the City will receive a one-time fee of \$25,000 as well as an annual payment of \$2,500.
5. Approved a resolution granting a conditional cardroom license to Thomas Farrage, Jr. and Danny A. Figueroa; the license is not site-specific.
6. Approved the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with three represented employee bargaining units including Clerical/Para-Professional/Recreation, Laborers’ Local 1184, and Mid-Management; the MOU’s cover the years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, expiring next June 30.
7. Sitting as the Redevelopment Agency Board of Directors, adopted the Fiscal Year 2011-2012 Budget in the amount of \$16,598,991

September 28, 2011

SOLAR TRUST OF AMERICA CEO ADDRESSES CITY COUNCIL

Mr. Uwe Schmidt, CEO and Chairman of the Board of Solar Trust of America, visited Blythe on September 13, 2011 for the purpose of addressing the City Council during the council meeting held that evening.

Mr. Schmidt, who is based in Cleveland, Ohio, made the journey to Blythe specifically to visit with the council members and public to discuss the delay in his company's solar project. The company, once going by the name Solar Millennium, is planning to build the largest solar plant in the world on BLM land located just northwest of the Blythe Airport.

Visiting dignitaries, including California Governor Jerry Brown and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, attended the project's groundbreaking this past June and construction was expected to commence late this summer.

The company recently announced a delay of approximately 14 months as it has decided to change the technology it will be employ from parabolic trough to photovoltaic. Mr. Schmidt told the City Council that his company is here to stay and is dedicated to the project. The change in technology and resultant delay is due, in part, to the decline in the cost of photovoltaic panels. With a solar field covering approximately 6,000 acres, that will be a lot of cost savings on panels.

During the City Council meeting, the Mayor asked Mr. Schmidt if he would take questions from the audience and he did so very graciously. Earlier in the day, Mr. Schmidt visited radio station KJMB-FM and went on the air specifically to address the construction delay issue and to assure listeners that the project will eventually move ahead. Blythe is eagerly awaiting the beehive of activity that will hit town when the project gets rolling.

September 21, 2011

VOTE BY MAIL: VOTE FIRST, COUNT FIRST!

Did you know that vote by mail ballots are the first to be counted on election night? Once the polls close, the Registrar of Voters may begin counting vote by mail ballots while poll workers close up and get their ballots to the Registrar's office in Riverside. As it takes 3-4 hours for ballots cast in Blythe to make their way to Riverside, the more vote by mail ballots the County has, the faster preliminary results can be released. During the last election most cities in Riverside County had final results by 11:30 p.m. At that time, however, Blythe's ballots had just begun to arrive at the Registrar's office. Any voter can vote by mail. You can opt to vote by mail once or choose to receive all ballots by mail. Vote by mail ballots are mailed to voters up to 29 days prior to Election Day and vote by mail voters are able to check online to verify that the Registrar has received their ballot. Vote by mail ballots can be returned by mail, at a vote by mail drop-off box (there is one in City Hall during every election) or at any polling place in the County on Election Day. Avoid the lines at the polling places and sign up to vote by mail where you can vote first and count first. For more information visit www.voteinfo.net.

Some important dates to remember:

- | | |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| October 11, 2011 | First day you can vote |
| October 24, 2011 | Last day you may register to vote in the November Election |
| November 1, 2011 | Last day to request a vote by mail ballot |
| November 8, 2011 | Election Day; polls are open from 7:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. |

September 13, 2011

POLICE ACTIVITIES LEAGUE AGAIN SPONSORS SUMMER SWIM PROGRAM

Thanks to the efforts of the Blythe Police Activities League (PAL), the summer swim program was again a resounding success. Just as PAL did last summer, this year it again designed and operated a program through which kids had a place to splash and play during the hot summer days. For this year's 6-week program, PAL provided the following:

- Fundraising efforts
- Lifeguard re-certification
- Community open swim
- Water aerobic and lap swim fitness program
- Swimming lessons provided by American Red Cross trained lifeguards
- Water safety program called "Be cool, swim in a pool"
- Safety equipment including guard buoys, life jackets, and swim lesson equipment
- Aerobic program equipment
- Local swim meet for kids and the community
- Nine limited term jobs
- Radio and newspaper advertising
- All materials for fliers
- Refrigerator for drinks and snacks
- Custodial services
- Hiring and scheduling of pool staff
- Payroll services and workers compensation
- Created the Blythe PAL Desert Dolphins Swim Team that participated in the Imperial Valley League swim meets

Keeping kids out of the canals and teaching them water safety is vitally important in this community and PAL expresses its appreciation to the many donors and volunteers who helped to make this program a success. And the community, in turn, expresses its appreciation to PAL for caring enough about kids to make this program happen again.

August 18, 2011

CITY AND SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTNER FOR CHILD SAFETY

Okay, it's time for the full story and *all* the facts. Very early this year, a local resident noticed a problem with students from the new Appleby School jaywalking across 14th Ave. The resident was understandably concerned for the safety of the kids. He took his problem to the school district which then contacted the City for advice and assistance. A

contingent of City staff, led by the Mayor and including the aforementioned resident, researched the issue and determined the following:

Students were leaving the school from the northeast corner of the campus grounds and heading north on 3rd Street toward 14th Ave. When they arrived at 14th, some of them jaywalked across 14th in a diagonal, northeasterly direction. Existing crosswalks on 14th, which were already in place dating to the time the old Appleby was in use, were apparently of no interest to the kids. In order to use them, they would have had to have walked about 50-100 feet west on 14th, then head north across 14th in the existing crosswalk, and then continue their easterly trek along 14th. But rather than do that, kids being kids simply jaywalked.

While the City looked at all possible remedies, including suggesting that the school district fence an area near the school specifically to keep the kids from walking north on 3rd Street to begin with, the school district asked the City to install stop signs, effectively making for an awkward, 5-way stop intersection. The City replied that an all-way stop could very well be the answer but could not unilaterally install stop signs until a warrant study was commissioned.

A warrant study is a traffic study, conducted by a licensed Traffic Engineer, that looks at all issues potentially affecting an intersection and determines whether or not stop signs are, well, *warranted!* The reason the City needs the study is that it must rely on the advice of trained, licensed engineers to determine whether or not stop signs are, in fact, the right answer. Traffic flow/safety really is a science. Imagine the liability to the City if it unilaterally installed a stop sign and an accident occurred. In court, the judge would ask if the City had conducted a warrant study prior to installing the signs and when the answer was no, it hadn't, the City would be in big trouble. A quick fix that may appear to be common sense to most of us may be the wrong thing to do; trained professionals see and know things the rest of us do not.

The City and school district conducted many, many joint meetings, with the School Superintendent on down (and quite a few of these meetings were held on-site) for the purpose of finding the proper fix. And, of course, with no money in either budget for this particular project, both agencies were particularly challenged in finding a way to make it work, simply for the sake of pedestrian safety. It should also be noted that, contrary to current rumor, the local resident who first brought this issue to the school district's attention was included in a number of these meetings and contributed significantly throughout the entire process. It should also be noted that the City provided an on-site inspection of the problem for a member of the local print media; this media member was clearly up to speed on the issues facing both the school district and the City at the time.

The first hurdle was the cost of the warrant study; how much would it cost and who was going to pay the bill? The City initially advised the school district that a warrant study may cost as much as \$2,500 but committed to getting a written quote. In the interim, both parties continued to discuss ways of funding the project. Early on, the City, again with no money to address a problem that originated in the county (Appleby School is not within

city limits), committed to installing any and all signs that were ultimately determined to be warranted and it also committed to striping the road with crosswalks and other school zone indicators.

The City obtained a very favorable quote on a warrant study from a long-term City partner; it was that firm's experience with the City that resulted in such a favorable quote. The school district retained the firm to conduct the study and the City reiterated that it would perform the physical work and absorb that cost. The study ultimately indicated that two new stop signs would be okay and the City began the work just this past Monday.

As of today, the stop signs are in place and the new crosswalks have been painted as have some additional pavement markings. More signs and markings will follow shortly. Additionally, with school starting next Monday, the Blythe Police Department will deploy resources at the site for the purpose of drawing attention to the new stop signs so that drivers who routinely travel the route during school hours are made aware of the new traffic improvements.

But wait, the law is clear, there is more work to do and more money to spend. Once the City decided to paint new crosswalks, it was then required to install two ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) ramps on the north side of 14th Ave. at the termini of the new crosswalks. These ramps typically cost in excess of \$3,000 each but again, neither agency has the funds for even one. So the agreed-upon fix is that the school district will buy the concrete and the City will perform the work. That work will entail jackhammering out the appropriate sections of the existing sidewalk and then forming and pouring the two ADA-approved, handicap-accessible ramps.

Contrary to additional rumors making the rounds, no one from either agency intentionally dragged their feet and no one from either agency "played politics". Both agencies have rules, regulations, and laws to follow and budgets to administer. This project ended up being a good partnership forged, in part, from the need to fix something that was broken once it was brought to our attention.

As always, if anyone wants to know what is going on with any City project at any time, all they have to do is ask and we'll be happy to provide any information we can.

August 3, 2011

PALO VERDE VALLEY TRANSIT AGENCY TO THE RESCUE!

Here is a great story reflecting that the Desert Roadrunner is far more than just an ideal means of getting from here to there.

On Friday, July 29, 2011, very late in the afternoon, the City's Transit Manager received a call from the California Highway Patrol (CHP), via the Blythe Police Department Dispatch center, requesting assistance for 44 children who were passengers on a private school bus that broke down on Interstate 10 near Wileys Well Road. The CHP was tied up with multiple calls for assistance along I-10 and was also working a major incident

near Desert Center. CHP officers transported the children most affected by the extreme heat to Mesa Drive and had the remaining 35 children move to an underpass a quarter of a mile from the distressed bus.

With normal bus operations coming to a close for the day and staff levels thin due to vacations, a single call out was made and two drivers rushed into action to assist these young passengers in getting to safety. Barely 20 minutes after receiving the call, a cold, refreshing Desert Roadrunner bus was on-scene and transported all remaining children to Blythe. Shortly thereafter, a second bus met the children who had previously been transported to Mesa Drive and drove them to Blythe to be reunited with their group.

Transit agency personnel went above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that the children made it to safety in very harsh weather and boarding conditions. Members of the Valley Baptist Youth Group of Mesa, Arizona were extremely grateful that the safety of their children was of paramount importance even with other major incidents occurring near Blythe.

Members of the City's Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency did this community proud.

July 28, 2011

BLYTHE RECREATION CENTER: STILL OPEN FOR BUSINESS!

Contrary to what you may have heard, the Blythe Recreation Center is open and continues to thrive. The Recreation Center *was* slated to close on July 1, 2009, due to budget constraints, but a grant of \$260,000 from the Community Improvement Fund kept that from happening. Since that time staff has worked diligently to reduce budget expenditures by 40% and increase revenues by 35%. During the July 26, 2011 City Council Meeting, Council adopted the FY 2011/12 Budget which included a fully funded Recreation Center. What this means is that although the City continues to look for additional revenue sources for the long term operation, everyone can breathe a little easier knowing the Center will be open to serve this community another year. The City would like to thank everyone for their support of the Center over the past few years. If you haven't been to the Center lately you definitely need to stop in and visit. You will be amazed at all it has to offer. There are too many events and activities to list here but whatever you might be interested in can probably be found by stopping by 127 S. Main Street. Thanks again for your support and we look forward to seeing you at the Recreation Center!

July 27, 2011

RECENT ACTIONS OF THE BLYTHE CITY COUNCIL

During the City Council meeting of July 26, 2011, the City Council:

1. Received the 4th Quarter Progress Report on the adopted Council Goals & Objectives for fiscal year 2010-2011;
2. Approved the second reading of a new ordinance requiring all liquid waste haulers discharging into the City's designated disposal sites to maintain a

Riverside County Department of Environmental Health Liquid Waste Hauler Permit and Decal;

3. Adopted an Urgency ordinance “opting in” to the state’s new requirements affecting Redevelopment Agencies. Without this action, and pursuant to a state budget trailer bill recently signed by the governor (AB 1X 26), Redevelopment Agencies will be dissolved. The purpose for the urgency ordinance, which is good for a period of 45 days (but may be extended one time), was to allow the ordinance to become effective immediately. The Council also conducted the first reading of a permanent ordinance that will eventually replace the urgency ordinance.
4. Accepted the donation from Rail America of the existing railroad crossing equipment currently installed on Hobsonway; the council also accepted the donation from A&K Railroad Materials of 300’ of track still in place immediately south of the Hobsonway crossing.
5. Adopted the fiscal year 2011-2012 Operating and Capital budget, a spending plan totaling \$30,356,079; highlights of the budget include:
 - a. this is the third, consecutive budget that is balanced
 - b. revenue is projected to be up slightly over those of the past three years
 - c. no layoffs or structural deficits are anticipated
 - d. there is no known deficit in future years
 - e. \$2,500 was allocated to the Blythe Fire Department for its annual July 4th fireworks display
 - f. Only *two* of the City’s 27 funds are projected to end the fiscal year in the **red**; this compared to only three short years ago in which *nine* funds ended the year in the **red**

With continued hard work, a little luck, and with the state staying out of the City’s pockets, the budget should get even stronger.

July 22, 2011

RUMOR CONTROL

The City has no knowledge of either a 7-11 convenience store, or a Circle K, to be built on the vacant lot immediately north of Starbucks. Furthermore, there is no truth to the rumor that the City “killed the deal” and sent them away. As far as the City knows, there isn’t any deal of any kind to kill! This is not to say that these stores aren’t considering building there (or elsewhere) and may one day do so, however at this point in time, neither company has contacted the City for any reason. So if they are, in fact, interested in building there, they had better check with City Hall first!

July 22, 2011

BLYTHE RECEIVES LARGE GRANT AWARD FOR CNG STATION

In a June 2, 2011 update of the BlytheBlast!, it was announced that the City of Blythe had applied for grant funding from the Mojave Air Quality Management District for two projects relating to the construction of fueling stations that would dispense compressed natural gas (CNG). The City’s transit agency currently owns two buses (with more to come) powered by CNG that are now fueled through a temporary, trailer-mounted system owned and operated by Hayday Farms.

The City is extremely pleased to announce that, subject to final approval of the Board of Directors of the Mojave Air Quality Management District, one of the two Blythe projects will be funded. More specifically, the Hayday Farms application was approved for funding in the amount of \$312,000! These funds will be used to construct a permanent, joint liquefied natural gas (LNG)/CNG station to fuel not only Hayday's own fleet of trucks and the City's transit buses but also any other vehicles traveling on Interstate 10 that require these types of fuels.

With a total of \$1 million available through the Mojave Air Quality Management District and with 12 total applications received, only 5 projects were funded. It is noteworthy that the Blythe/Hayday application ranked 3rd overall and received the largest of the five cash awards! Once final approval is granted by the District, the City and Hayday Farms will work closely on siting and constructing the new fueling station, most likely to be located near Interstate 10 at the east end of town.

In the interim, the City will continue to pursue construction of its own smaller CNG station, with previously-awarded grant funds, within the City's Public Works yard. This redundant system will help to ensure that the transit district's buses will always have access to CNG.

July 5, 2011

UPDATE ON SOLAR MILLENNIUM PROJECT

After a 17-hour day put in recently by members of the Blythe City Council, it would appear that this project, and the hundreds of jobs it will bring to Blythe, is ready to move forward.

This project, to be constructed northwest of the Blythe Municipal Airport, will be the world's largest of its kind. Using what is known as parabolic trough technology, it will consist of approximately 6,000 acres of mirrors focused on pipes, heating the oil within those pipes, and then creating steam from that heated oil to drive generators.

The project was slated to receive final approval from the County of Riverside on June 7, 2011, however the item was removed from the agenda of the Board of Supervisors that date until the possible imposition of a County franchise fee could be resolved.

The issue was one of the County considering the adoption of a 2%-of-gross franchise fee to be placed on any solar project requiring either an easement from the County or other discretionary approval. According to representatives of Solar Millennium, this fee would have amounted to approximately \$6 million annually for the life of the project, roughly 30 years. Solar Millennium representatives claimed further that this proposed fee took them by surprise and that it was not factored into the project's pro forma. With power purchase agreements at fixed prices already in place, the company claimed further that there would be no way for it to recoup the \$6 million annually.

The County's intent with imposing the fee is to offset the unavoidable, negative impacts of such a large scale project and that the fee was discussed as far back as February. The County indicated further that franchise fees date back to 1913 and are not unusual.

Prior to this issue being revisited by the County Board of Supervisors on June 28, 2011, the City Council met in a special meeting on June 22, 2011 and voted unanimously to oppose the fee. Although the project will not be located within City limits and is therefore not subject to any entitlements that could be granted by the City, the City Council took the position of opposing the fee because it was concerned that Solar Millennium could pull out. The Council did not want the new fee to cause the project to move to another county or even another state.

All five members of the City Council traveled to Riverside on June 28, 2011 for the purpose of attending the meeting of the Board of Supervisors. A few of them left Blythe at 6:00 a.m., and did not return home until 11:00 p.m., so that they could hear every word of the discussion in the Board Chambers. Early in the discussion, Supervisor John Benoit proposed a series of amendments to the franchise fee, one of which would exempt the Solar Millennium project from the fee because the project was all but entitled.

More than 50 people spoke during the Board meeting, including Mayor DeConinck and Councilmen Contreras and Patel, a vast majority of whom spoke against the proposed fee. The end result was that Solar Millennium was exempted from the new County franchise fee. Additionally, the Board of Supervisors decided to commission a study for the purpose of developing a fair fee to be imposed on future projects.

June 20, 2011

NEW SHADE STRUCTURES FOR CITY HALL PARKING LOT

There is some construction activity going on in the City Hall parking lot right now. City crews are installing new shade structures for employee and visitor parking. The structures were purchased years ago with bond proceeds acquired for construction of City Hall but were never erected. The material has been sitting in the Public Works yard all this time but will be up soon, hopefully in time to provide shade for a majority of the summer.

June 20, 2011

CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS OF THE MEETING OF JUNE 14, 2011

During the City Council meeting of June 14, 2011, the Council took the following actions:

- Approved the Fireworks display request of the Blythe Volunteer Fire Department for its annual July 4th fireworks show.
- Approved two requests for the sale and display of fireworks of the Blythe Social Club and Tony & Patricia Ojeda and the First Assembly of God.
- Delayed the second reading of Ordinance No. 849-2011 approving a zone change for the Neighbors RV Park and Commercial Center until the City Council meeting of June 28, 2011.

- Approved a motion to “Reconsider” the prior approval (Council meeting of May 24, 2011) of the Neighbors RV Park and Commercial Center; the item will be heard again during the City Council meeting of June 28, 2011.
- Approved the annual assessments for Lighting Districts Nos. 1 and 2; agreed to consider a request by the Fairway Villas at Mesa Bluffs Homeowners Association allowing it to assume responsibility for the landscape maintenance in that zone.
- Approved a resolution calling for a general municipal election for November 8, 2011 for the purpose of conducting a City Council election for the seats currently held by Carie Covell and Richard Contreras.
- Approved a Memorandum of Understanding with Hull Farms and the Michael J. Farrage and Cindy K. Farrage Trust for future real estate negotiations relating to the proposed Visitors Park on Interstate 10; this action was needed in advance of an application to the state of California for more than \$1,000,000 in grant funds for construction of the Visitors Park.
- Approved participation in a joint chip seal program with Riverside County for portions of 6th Ave. and 10th Ave.
- Approved contract documents for the rehabilitation of the college water reservoir.

June 6, 2011

A PERIODIC REVIEW OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CITY OF BLYTHE

This is a topic that merits periodic review as we tend to forget what services the City does (and doesn't) provide. A question at times seems to be, “Why doesn't the City just serve as all things to all people?” The thinking seems to be that it's big, powerful, bureaucratic, it takes in a lot of taxpayer money, and it's a hundred miles from anywhere. Surely the City can solve all the problems of the region including those of the schools, the hospital, the college, local businesses, and the unemployed.

This is not true. Blythe is a “General Law” city which means that it may exercise its powers only as specifically outlined in State law. This is in contrast to a Charter City which has a broader range of powers that are locally guided by a Charter adopted by the city's electorate. Just for reference, 357 of the state's 477 cities are general law cities whereas 120 are charter cities.

The City is a stand-alone, unit of local government that is charged with specific activities as spelled out in a series of laws known collectively as the Blythe Municipal Code (BMC). The BMC consists of ordinances which, in very basic terms, are laws. That's right, the City Council adopts and enforces laws.

The City also adopts proclamations which are nothing more than “feel good” instruments, and resolutions which are technical tools for getting City work done. Ordinances, however, are laws. These laws are considered “enabling legislation”, something the City needs before it can undertake an activity. If the enabling legislation doesn't exist, typically in either state law or the BMC, the City pretty much can't engage in whatever activity is being discussed.

Some things the City is NOT? It is not, nor is it responsible for: Palo Verde Hospital, Riverside County (e.g. Sheriff, County Fire, District Attorney, courts, etc.), Palo Verde

College, the State of California, Palo Verde Irrigation District, Palo Verde Unified School District, special districts, utility companies, banks, service clubs, the Blythe Area Chamber of Commerce, the cemetery district, the Colorado River Country Fair, the California Highway Patrol, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the U.S. Border Patrol, and the Community Improvement Fund (CIF).

Each of these organizations has its own board, commission, council, or other guiding body, its own chief executive officer, its own budget, and its own set of bylaws similar to the BMC. They each do their thing and the City does its. Not only is the City NOT these things, it CANNOT be without the aforementioned enabling legislation. Monies of these agencies are generally not commingled and, with very few exceptions, this means that City taxpayer dollars cannot be used for the programs or projects of those other agencies.

So what services does the City provide? Within a very specific, geographically-defined area (rare exceptions notwithstanding) of approximately 23 square miles, the City provides Police, fire, water, sewer, streets, parks, planning/zoning, animal control, building inspection, code enforcement, golf course, recreation, and redevelopment.

Inasmuch as the City is a business, it also includes the infrastructure needed to run any business including personnel/payroll, finance (general ledger, budget, accounts payable, accounts receivable, investments, etc.), risk management, building maintenance, central garage, legal counsel, and administration.

Here are some interesting city and county statistics:

- As stated above, there are 477 cities in California
- California has 58 counties
- Nationwide, there are 3,140 counties and 19,350 cities
- San Bernardino County is the largest (in area) in the contiguous, 48 states
- The City of Los Angeles is the most populous in California at 10,400,000
- The City of Amador has the smallest population in California at 209
- Alpine County has the smallest population in California at 1,201
- Riverside County has 27 cities and a population of 2.1 million
- The City of Indian Wells has the smallest population in Riverside County at 5,100
- The City of Riverside is the most populous in Riverside County at 300,000

June 2, 2011

CITY APPLIES FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR ALTERNATIVE FUELING STATION

The City has submitted a grant application to the Mojave Air Quality Management District with the hope of being awarded an additional \$108,000 for the construction of a compressed natural gas (CNG) fueling station.

The City's transit agency was awarded grant funds a number of years ago and, through a partnership with local Hayday Farms, had intended on jointly constructing a CNG fueling station. The transit agency owns two CNG-fueled buses, and intends to acquire more, however there is no local availability of CNG. Hayday Farms owns a fleet of trucks that use liquefied natural gas (LNG) and

fuels its trucks from a trailer-mounted tank located here in Blythe. With a compressor added to the mix, CNG is created and the transit agency's buses can be fueled.

A number of circumstances, however, including insufficient funds, precluded construction of the permanent station but renewed talks have seemingly found a way to make it work. The City's interest, by the way, has an economic development component to it, that being to lure CNG-fueled trucks off Interstate 10 and have the drivers buy fuel here in Blythe.

The City, Hayday Farms, and Mojave Air Quality are all interested in seeing the construction of this permanent CNG fueling station. Although the reasons differ, the end result will be the same so all have partnered in the grant application process. Funds are being sought not only to help Hayday Farms construct a permanent station, but also the aforementioned \$108,000 to add to the City's existing funding for constructing a second, smaller CNG station within the City's Public Works yard specifically to fuel the transit buses. Having redundant systems locally will help to ensure that the transit agency's two current (and future) buses will always have access to this cleaner-burning, alternative fuel.

The City hopes to hear back on its grant application by mid-summer.

May 27, 2011

ALL VESTIGES OF RAILROAD TO DISAPPEAR SHORTLY

Take a last look at any railroad tracks and signs you see in Blythe and the entire Palo Verde Valley; it will all be gone by summer.

A few years ago, Rail America petitioned the Surface Transportation Board (STB) for the right to abandon the 49-mile stretch of rail line that ran from Rice to Ripley, right through the heart of Blythe. The City, together with a number of concerned business owners, fought the abandonment. In the end, however, the STB sided with Rail America.

Although the STB decision was handed down last year, the tracks and signs remained in place. As long as they remained, there was always hope, however slim, that the rail line could be re-established one day.

About two weeks ago, however, crews from A&K Railroad Materials, Inc., came to town to begin the removal process. A&K bought the materials from Rail America for the scrap value which is currently very high. As an example, a 39' piece of 110-pound track (in this example, 110 pounds is the weight of every three feet of track) currently sells for \$575. A 33' piece of 90-pound track sells for \$500.

Conventional wisdom says that once the track is gone, it will never come back as it would be cost-prohibitive. Two examples: Each *foot* of new track costs \$100 and each new railroad tie costs \$45.

On a final note, the City is still working with A&K, Rail America, and Assemblyman Manuel Perez in an attempt to secure some of the equipment and track for historical

purposes. Can't you just picture a restored engine or rail car sitting upon some original track in downtown Blythe?

Visit the City's Facebook page to see some final pictures of the tracks, signs, lights, and arms that will soon be gone.

May 26, 2011

CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS OF MAY 24, 2011

The following are a few actions taken by the City Council during the regular meeting of May 24, 2011:

1. Approved a critical component of the environmental review required for the proposed sewer installation project on Mesa Bluffs; this approval brings the project closer to reality.
2. Accepted a donation from the County of Riverside, in the amount of \$213,000, as all matching funds required for the Roberti-Z'Berg-Harris state parks bond grant that will make infrastructure improvements to Quechan Park and Marina.
3. Concurred with the County of Riverside's request to cancel the Fire Service Agreements for the provision of services to various annexed areas of the city; the services will terminate effective June 30, 2011. The City's volunteer fire department will continue to provide the required services.
4. Approved various steps needed by a developer for development of a recreational vehicle park to be located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Hobsonway and Neighbours Blvd. It is anticipated that this park, and others, will be needed to accommodate the influx of construction workers expected in conjunction with the Solar Millennium solar project that will be constructed northwest of the Blythe Airport.
5. Approved an agreement with the County of Riverside for design of the proposed Hobsonway/Riviera Drive I-10 Improvement Project. This is the first step toward eventually constructing a Visitors Park in the area with the goal being to entice westbound drivers entering from Arizona to exit the freeway and spend some time and money in Blythe.
6. Authorized the Vice Mayor to begin implementing a Youth Government Council, utilizing recently-awarded grant funds, that will work with local young people as they prepare to be tomorrow's leaders.
7. Sitting as the Redevelopment Agency Board of Directors, the council members approved repairs to the Birch Street water reservoir and water production facility on Murphy Street.

Staff also reported to the City Council that cleanup of the old Ice Plant on Main Street was progressing and appears to be on schedule. The goal is to have it completely cleaned up before visitors arrive for the busy July 4th holiday.

May 26, 2011

MORE TECHNICAL PROBLEMS WITH ELECTRONIC MESSAGE SIGN

Just as soon as one technical problem was fixed, another has appeared. The City thanks you for your patience as it continues to work out the bugs!

May 11, 2011

CLEAN UP OF ICE PLANT BURNOUT BEGINS TODAY!

After a very long time, the burned-out eyesore that was once the Ice House on North Main Street will finally be cleaned up! The historic building burned to the ground on April 1, 2009; the City has been trying to force the owner (the City does not own the site) to clean it up but has met with resistance.

Contrary to popular belief that the City “is doing nothing” with the site, the City has worked long and hard behind the scenes to get it cleaned up. It finally took court action to get the issue resolved and the owner has agreed to a strict timetable for the cleanup.

The demolition permit was issued by the City today and the contractor began work today as well. Look for the site to be cleaned up shortly! The City thanks the community for its patience in getting to this point.

May 10, 2011

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO EAST BLYTHE SHOOTING INCIDENT

There is yet another false rumor making the rounds around town claiming that Blythe police officers took too long to respond to the scene of the shooting at a bar in East Blythe. Some reports are claiming that it took the Blythe Police Department 15 minutes to arrive whereas yet other inaccurate reports say that Blythe Ambulance took too long to respond. On this particular night, the Blythe Police Department had nine (9) police officers on duty. The FACTS are as follows:

BLYTHE POLICE DEPARTMENT

12:50 a.m.	Call received and dispatched at the same time
12:52 a.m.	Officers Ley, Burt, and Jones arrived on scene
12:53 a.m.	Officers requested expedited response from Blythe Ambulance
1:03 a.m.	Officer Adams advised he was following medics to Blythe Airport

BLYTHE AMBULANCE

12:53 a.m.	Dispatched
12:55 a.m.	Enroute
12:58 a.m.	Arrived on scene
1:03 a.m.	Enroute to airport

While this incident was tragic, Blythe’s emergency responders did a commendable job getting to the scene quickly.

May 10, 2011

CLARIFICATION OF OPERATION STONEGARDEN

There is apparently some misunderstanding around town regarding a current police action funded through a new federal grant. More specifically, the City has heard a few negative comments regarding Blythe police officers supposedly “wasting their time sitting at the Port of Entry when they should be protecting the City instead”.

The officers seen at the Port of Entry are doing exactly as required by the new grant which is known as “Stonegarden” (see BlytheBlast! update of April 18). Requirements are to patrol areas of ingress and egress from the Mexico Border specifically looking for smugglers; officers are to target highways and desert trails. So if you see Blythe police officers at the Port of Entry, they are paid by the federal government (not City taxpayers) to be there and are doing their jobs. Rest assured the required number of officers are still protecting the city as usual.

May 3, 2011

BUDGET CONFUSION FROM CLOSURE OF COUNTY FIRE STATION

During the City Council meeting of April 26, 2011, representatives of CalFire advised the City Council that County Fire Station 43 is likely to close early this summer. As part of the presentation, it was noted that the County needs \$550,000 to remain open. There is some confusion over that sum of money and what spending it would accomplish. It would seem that some people think that the City now has the option of contracting for citywide fire services and such services will cost only \$550,000. This is incorrect.

The \$550,000 needed by the County would maintain the status quo, nothing else. With that amount of money, Station 43 would remain open and primarily continue to serve the needs of residents within the unincorporated areas, not the core of the city (mutual aid and separate annexation agreements notwithstanding).

In simpler terms, nothing would change other than the City would be out \$550,000 per year (which it does not have) and would have to continue to fund its own volunteer department.

What was not discussed in any detail during the council meeting was the cost to the City should the City Council desire to contract with the County for citywide services; that cost would be \$1,250,000. The existing, City Volunteer Fire Department currently costs the City less than \$400,000 per year and the service is exemplary.

April 27, 2011

FISCAL AUDITOR PRAISES CITY BUDGET AGAIN!

In the Blythe Blast! update of April 20, we informed you that the City’s fiscal auditor released his findings of the fiscal year 2009-2010 budget audit. Those findings included a positive fund balance of \$567,000. Rich Teaman, of Teaman, Ramirez, and Smith, made a formal presentation on the subject to the City Council during the meeting of April 26, 2011. Although he stressed that the City’s General Fund is still over \$2 million in the red,

he was quick to point out the significant progress of the past two years. His comments included:

1. "We have issued an 'Unqualified' opinion which is the highest level of opinion"
2. "This is the largest, positive gain in the General Fund since 2002"
3. "We're encouraged, this is the first positive change in quite awhile"

With the continuing deficit, however, the General Fund still has a long way to go before it is out of the woods but the auditor added that the City is clearly on the right track.

April 27, 2011

CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS OF APRIL 26, 2011

Among the actions taken by the City Council during its regular meeting of April 26, 2011 were the following:

1. Approved an agreement with the State Franchise Tax Board whereby the City and the state will exchange business license information. The agreement will help to ensure a level playing field in which all businesses will obtain required business licenses. The City regularly receives complaints from business owners about others not being licensed and this reciprocal agreement with the state should help with their concerns.
2. Approved an agreement with The Holt Group to perform the environmental review required in advance of the installation of the culvert pipe in the levee separating Quechan Marina from the Colorado River.

April 27, 2011

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CITY ON ADDITIONAL WEBSITES

While the City has its own website (www.cityofblythe.ca.gov), it should be noted that some individual City operations maintain their own sites as well. To learn more about various City services, please feel free to visit the following websites:

Fire Department:	blythefire.com
Golf Course:	blythegolfcourse.com
Transit Agency:	pvvta.com

April 27, 2011

ELECTRONIC MESSAGE SIGN GROWING PAINS

You may have noticed that the sign has been difficult to read of late. It was installed in November of last year and worked very well for the first couple of months and then began experiencing the problems you see now. The sign manufacturer, installer, and the City's computer people are all working on a fix and it has not yet been determined if the problem is hardware or software. The City thanks you for your patience as it works to correct the problem. But the good part? The sign is under warranty until 2014!

April 27, 2011

FLAGS IN CITY PARKS

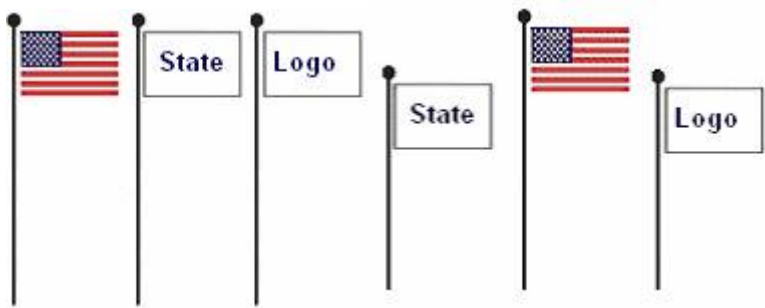
With the recent addition of the POW/MIA flag to the set of three flagpoles in Gateway Park, some confusion has arisen over the proper placement of the flags. The City originally raised the U.S. Flag on the center pole because it is the tallest pole. A couple of

community organizations, however, contacted the City and advised that the U.S. Flag should be placed on its own right (to the viewer's left). For the past few weeks, therefore, the flag has been in that position. On further review, however, it was determined that the City's original placement was correct; the U.S. Flag belongs on the tallest pole when multiple poles are present. The following excerpt from the U.S. Flag Code was taken from the American Legion website:

§ 7. Position and manner of display

(c) No other flag or pennant should be placed above or, if on the same level, to the right of the flag of the United States of America

The City thanks those who took the time to notice the array of flags and to comment on the proper placement.



April 25, 2011

POLICE ACTIVITIES LEAGUE AWARDED GRANT FOR YOUTH PROGRAM

The Blythe Police Activities League (PAL) has been awarded an \$8,768 grant by The Community Foundation. The funds will help to provide the youth of the Palo Verde Valley with training and leadership skills so they can form their own council and share their ideas and concerns with the City of Blythe Government. The program will teach youth how to organize projects, how to communicate and listen effectively, team building, and public speaking. The grant period will be May 1, 2011 through April 30, 2012. Contact Valerie Hudson or Pam Bush at the Police Department for more details

April 25, 2011

NOTHING FOR KIDS TO DO IN BLYTHE. REALLY?

In response to those who continue to claim that Blythe offers few or no activities for kids, the City offers the following for consideration:

1. Little League
2. Flag football
3. Pop Warner football
4. Soccer League
5. City Recreation Center
 - a. basketball
 - b. volleyball
 - c. racquetball
 - d. indoor activities

- camps
- boxing
- crafts

- e. summer outdoor activities

6. Police Activities League
7. Bowling alley
8. Blythe Fitness
9. Fishing in the canals
10. Hunting (with adult supervision)
11. River activities
 - a. fishing
 - b. swimming
 - c. boating
 - d. skiing
12. Martial arts studio
13. Boy Scouts/Cub Scouts
14. Girl Scouts
15. Skate park
16. Summer pool
17. City and County parks
 - a. ballfields
 - b. playground equipment
18. Desert activities
 - a. ATV riding
 - b. motorcycle riding
 - c. hiking
 - d. camping
19. 18-hole golf course with youth rates
20. Bike riding
21. Archery Club
22. Interact club
23. 4-H club
24. FFA
25. Skateboarding
26. Part time/summer jobs
27. School activities
28. Hobbies
29. Read/visit the library
30. Collect bottles and cans for the recycling value
31. Volunteer to help an elderly neighbor plant a garden
32. Volunteer at a church
33. Take guitar lessons
34. Care for a pet
35. Build a model airplane
36. Build a go-cart
37. Do chores and homework

- 38. Movie on the Green
- 39. Sandlot baseball
- 40. Sandlot football
- 41. Cheerleading
- 42. Dance studios
- 43. Church groups

April 20, 2011

STOP THE PRESSES! CITY BUDGET MAKES HUGE GAIN!

The City's outside, fiscal auditor has just advised the City that the outcome of the fiscal year 2009-2010 audit was another positive fund balance, this time to the tune of \$567,000! This is huge news and it is the first time since 2003 that the City has had two, consecutive years of positive fund balances! With a \$287,000 savings identified in the 2008-2009 audit, the two-year, combined total of approximately \$854,000 to the good means that the financial hole has shrunk from \$3.4 million in 2008 to \$2.55 million today. Still a very large, negative number, but the positive trend cannot be ignored! And all this during what is arguably the worst economy since the Great Depression!

April 19, 2011

RECAP OF CITY POSITIONS LOST

Dating back to the fall of 2008 when the City's severe budget problem first surfaced, the City has lost 36 staff members to layoffs, retirements, and other separations. Those losses, as a percentage of the beginning totals within each bargaining unit, were as follows:

Management:	60% (10 original positions, 4 today)
Laborers:	55% (31 original positions, 14 today)
Mid-Management:	48% (21 original positions, 11 today)
Clerical/Recreation:	23% (13 original positions, 10 today)

There seems to be a misconception that Management was somehow "spared" during the layoffs. As these numbers clearly indicate, the pain was spread throughout City Hall with Management taking the biggest hit.

April 19, 2011

RECAP OF BUDGET REDUCTIONS

It should be noted that the City has drastically reduced its budget in the three years since the severe budget problem became known. The adopted General Fund budget in Fiscal Year 2008-2009 was \$11,809,224; the amount adopted last summer for the current fiscal year was \$9,658,436. This reduction of \$2,150,788 equates to an overall reduction of 18% (22% when a one-time grant of \$500,000 is removed from the equation). The overall City budget between Fiscal Year 2008-2009 and the current year has been reduced by \$5,429,756, or 15%. Notable reductions include:

<u>Department</u>	<u>2008-2009</u>	<u>Today</u>	<u>Reduction</u>
Recreation Center	\$ 540,600	\$ 249,018	54%
City Manager Department	\$ 354,032	\$ 178,953	49%

Development Services Dept.	\$1,028,747	\$ 632,725	38%
City Council	\$ 82,178	\$ 66,219	19%
Police Department	\$5,107,994	\$4,600,472	10%

Additionally, actual expenses have also been managed extremely well. As an example, the total overtime expended within the Police Department for fiscal years 2009-2010 and 2008-2009 was \$182,967 whereas for the two years prior to that (2007-2008 and 2006-2007) the total was \$476,115. This represents a phenomenal drop of 62%.

April 18, 2011

NEW POLICE DEPARTMENT GRANTS

“OPERATION STONEGARDEN”

The Blythe Police Department is very proud to announce that OPERATION STONEGARDEN (OPSG) is up and running within the City of Blythe and Riverside County. The focus of the operation will be to increase law enforcement presence in areas identified through intelligence information as "high-entry" points and routes of egress used by narcotic smuggling and human trafficking organizations, or as central transportation hubs. Through the enforcement of the California Penal Code, Stonegarden officers will act as a second tier of Homeland Security, thereby allowing for increased police presence and further allowing the Police and Sheriff to patrol in a proactive manner in collaboration with the United States Border Patrol-Yuma Sector. This operation is fully funded by the federal government with the City's portion of the grant being \$198,000. The City will also obtain a new vehicle and a license plate reader through this grant.

“SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL”

The federal Safe Routes to School Grant Program has awarded the Blythe Police Department a grant that will greatly improve the safety of our children as travel to and from school. As a supplement to the current safety education efforts of the Blythe Police Department, a program entitled “It's cool to walk to school” will be instituted in our community. The Safe Routes to School grant funds will provide:

1. Education- Grade level appropriate curriculum will teach students in grades K through 8 bicycle and pedestrian safety. A School Resources Officer, along with a Community Services Officer, will hold assemblies and classroom forums.
2. Encouragement- The Walking School Bus program will encourage parents to walk their children to school as opposed to driving them. This will lessen the vehicle traffic congestion that is currently the norm before and after school.

3. Enforcement- The zones around the schools will have new signage that alert drivers to their current speed and the posted limit. There will be increased patrol during peak hours and aggressive and dangerous drivers will be cited.
4. Safety- A bicycle helmet program will be included in the school assembly programs.

April 18, 2011

LIGHT FIXTURE RETROFIT

In an effort to save money on electric bills, last year the City partnered with Southern California Edison (SCE) in a program through which the latter conducted an energy usage audit. At no cost to the City, SCE inspected the light fixtures at all City buildings and recommended that all be replaced with more energy-efficient units. With no money in the budget for such a project, the City applied for, and was awarded, a grant through the state in the amount of \$129,704. The retrofit is occurring right now and the lights are not only cheaper to operate, they are more efficient in the amount of light they provide.

April 18, 2011

NEW RIDING MOWERS TO BE PURCHASED

During the City Council meeting of April 12, 2011, the Council approved the purchase of two, 72" John Deere riding mowers. These new pieces of equipment will be used to mow the many acres of grass at the City's numerous, public parks. There will be no fiscal impact to the current fiscal year's budget as the mowers will be purchased through proceeds of the City auction of surplus equipment that was conducted on March 18, 2011.

April 18, 2011

NO MORE SMELL!

During the Blythe Redevelopment Agency meeting of April 12, 2011, the Board approved the lease of five odor scrubbers to be used at the following sewer lift stations:

Sewer lift # 3, Del Taco – 129 S. Lovekin

Sewer lift # 5, City Yard – 490 S. Main

Sewer lift # 11, Intake – 392 S. Intake

Sewer lift # 13, PV Oasis – 2128 Sparkling Lagoon

Sewer lift # 14, Sixth Ave – 6200 Defrain Blvd

Using advanced technology, the new scrubbers will be 50% more effective against odors.

April 18, 2011

REVENUE ENHANCEMENT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The City, through a partnership with Riverside County, has identified a new source of revenue to be used to partially offset expenses of the City's Economic Development division. The City will receive \$35,000 from the federal Community Development Block Grant program via Riverside County's Economic Development Agency.

April 18, 2011

ICE PLANT UPDATE

It has been more than two years since the old ice plant on Main Street burned to the ground and yes, the big pile of rubble remains. While the City does not own the property,

it has been requiring the owner of the site to clean it up, however the issue has been winding its way through the County court system for quite awhile. Indications are that there may be a resolution sometime this summer. Rest assured that the City is doing all it can to get the eyesore cleaned up!

April 18, 2011

PROPOSITION 84 GRANT APPLICATION, SUNRISE PARK

The City of Blythe, along with Riverside County Transportation and Caltrans, have partnered in an effort to close the current Riviera Drive exit off westbound Interstate 10. This off ramp would be relocated a mile further west to a safer location and will continue to provide access to Hobsonway as well as provide an opportunity for another City park. California State parks offers a competitive grant program that places an emphasis on new parks in under-served areas of communities.

The City of Blythe intends to apply for this funding in an effort to provide a new look to the entrance of our community and state. This proposed park will provide restrooms and picnic areas for travelers and the community. Other possible amenities include a dog run or dog park, a playground, and information kiosks that will list community activities and general information. Along with these amenities, a new and safer “Welcome to California” sign has been proposed, thus eliminating the dangerous practice of parking along the shoulder for photo opportunities. Community members should have a voice in the project and will be given an opportunity to express their opinions in a series of public input meetings to be held on the following dates:

May 10, 2011

May 26, 2011

June 14, 2011

All meetings will be held at City Hall beginning at 5:00 p.m.

April 14, 2011

CITY BUDGET CONTINUES TO MAKE DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENTS!

The condition of the City’s General Fund budget, which has been mired in a deep, multi-million dollar hole since 1998, continues to improve significantly. During the City Council meeting of January 25, 2011, outside fiscal auditor Rich Teaman of Teaman, Ramirez, and Smith presented to the Council his firm’s findings for the fiscal year 2008-2009 audit. Mr. Teaman advised the Council that the year ended with a positive fund balance of \$287,000! Considering that the three, previous years, as well as six of the last ten, all ended in red ink, this was a dramatic turnaround. Said Mr. Teaman, “Whatever you’ve been doing, keep it up!”

April 14, 2011

MORE POSITIVE BUDGET NEWS

During the City Council meeting of February 22, 2011, staff presented its mid-year budget review. With a fiscal year beginning July 1 of each year, a mid-year report has been presented each of the last three years for the purpose of advising the Council and informing the public as to the condition of the budget in each of those years. This year’s news was good; although the City still has very little disposable income, the budget is

stable. Unlike many other cities, counties, and school districts throughout California, Blythe does not have a budget problem nor is one anticipated for the foreseeable future. While other agencies are scrambling to balance their budgets with projected deficits and looming layoffs, Blythe is not anticipating any such problems. It should be noted, however, that with the state's continuing budget problems, anything can happen. It has a history of raiding the coffers of cities and counties and until the state balances its own budget, the City could again be a target.

April 14, 2011

CITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES UPDATE

The City has made tremendous strides towards achieving the four goals and objectives adopted by the City Council in 2010. Those goals, in order, included:

1. Continue to work toward financial stability
2. Begin work on an economic development strategy
3. Begin development of Quechan Park/Marina
4. Begin work on developing a Visitors' Park on Interstate 10

As discussed immediately above, the City is certainly on the right track with pursuit of *financial stability*. The *economic development strategy* is taking shape with more than 60 community stakeholders invited to submit input into a plan that will help to improve the community's financial well being. Two stakeholder meetings were held in March. The City recently approved a contract with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) for design of a culvert pipe to be installed in the levee that separates the Colorado River from *Quechan Marina*; the pipe will help to keep the marina flushed out and cleaner. Additional projects will include a new restroom, entrance paving, and covered picnic areas. The *Visitors' Park* is slated to be located on westbound interstate 10 just west of the inspection station. Through a partnership with Riverside County, new highway off-and on-ramps are being designed to allow access to the new visitors' park. Overall progress on these four goals and objectives has been swift and steady and there is no sign of that progress letting up!

April 14, 2011

"SECRET" CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS?

Simply put, they don't exist in Blythe. Forget about what you may have heard elsewhere, there are no secret City Council meetings in Blythe. There is currently one rumor making the rounds claiming that the Council held a "secret" study session on March 15, 2011, ostensibly to force a tax increase upon Blythe residents. An additional part of the rumor said that the council voted to cancel that meeting because of its "secret" status. None of that is true.

The Study Session was noticed properly as required by the open meeting law in California known as the Brown Act. It was also advertised on the electronic message sign on Hobsonway which, at 20 feet in height, is anything but secret! Furthermore, the study session was not canceled, it was held (the Deputy City Attorney was present) with all five council members and many staff members in attendance. One council member made a motion to cancel the meeting but that motion lost on a 3-2 vote and the meeting continued to its intended conclusion.

April 14, 2011

AND SPEAKING OF TAX INCREASES....

First and foremost, the City Council CANNOT unilaterally raise or impose ANY taxes. Please read that line again. Another rumor around town right now is that the City Council is attempting to raise your taxes. Again, that is unequivocally false. Thanks to Proposition 218 of 1996, only you, the voter, can raise or impose taxes. The California Property Tax Information website specifically states:

“In November 1996, California voters passed Proposition 218, the ‘Right to Vote on taxes Act’. This constitutional amendment protects taxpayers by limiting the methods by which local governments can create or increase taxes, fees and charges without taxpayer consent. Proposition 218 requires voter approval prior to imposition or increase of general taxes, assessments, and certain user fees”.

Please visit the website to read for yourself how Proposition 218 protects us all from tax increases that we, the voters, did not approve. That website can be accessed at www.californiataxdata.com/pdf/Proposition218.pdf.

So with the protections of Proposition 218 in place, what, exactly, has the City Council been discussing? The only power the City Council has in this regard is deciding whether or not to place tax questions on the ballot. That’s it, nothing more. Again, the only thing the City Council can do is to provide voters the opportunity to decide for themselves whether or not taxes should be raised or new taxes imposed.

Placing a tax measure on a ballot requires a minimum of four votes from the City Council; if four or more council members vote “aye”, then the item(s) will be placed on a ballot for us to vote on. If only three or fewer vote “aye”, then there will be no public vote. It’s that simple!

The reason for the current discussions is that there will be a general election in November of this year which means that it will cost little or nothing for the City to add issues to that already-scheduled election. It takes a lot of time and effort to get something on the ballot so if Blythe is going to do it, now is the time to start.

With all of the foregoing in mind, the following taxes have been discussed recently:

Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) – This is also known as the “motel tax” and the “bed tax”. It is levied on anyone who rents a motel room within the City of Blythe. The current rate is 10%. In 2009, the City placed before the voters the concept of increasing this tax to 13% but the effort failed by 109 votes, 980-871 (53% to 47%). Had it passed, one-third of the new revenue (estimated at the time to have been \$90,000) would have gone to the Blythe Area Chamber of Commerce for tourist promotion while the remaining \$180,000 would have been retained by the City.

Sales Tax – As anyone who buys anything in Blythe knows, the current sales tax rate is 8.75% (this rate includes a 1% increase imposed by the state in the spring of 2009, ostensibly for a two-year period). There is often a misconception in cities about the amount of this tax rate that is retained by local government. In this case, the City of Blythe receives only 1% of the 8.75%. The balance goes to the state, the County, and to special taxes such as Measure M in Riverside County. It is estimated that a 1% increase in the sales tax would generate approximately \$1.5 million for the City.

Utility Users Tax – This would be an entirely new tax for Blythe although it is used extensively throughout California. Currently, 146 cities and 4 counties levy this tax and it is estimated that approximately one-half of all California residents pay this tax. It is a tax on anyone consuming utilities such as electricity, natural gas, water, sewer, sanitation, telephone, and cable television. For the sake of discussion, a 1% tax on electricity usage would generate approximately \$138,000 for the City and add \$1.23 to the average, monthly residential SCE bill in Blythe. A 1% tax on natural gas would generate \$16,000 for the City and add approximately 23 cents to the average, monthly residential bill. A water/sewer/sanitation tax of 1% would generate \$6,000 for the City and add approximately 90 cents to the average, monthly residential bill.

In summary, YOU, the voter, and NOT the City Council, have the final say on whether or not taxes are increased or new taxes imposed.

A final word on this topic; during the City Council meeting of April 12, 2011, the Council decided against placing any tax measures on the November ballot for voter consideration.

April 14, 2011

NEW APPLEBY PARK PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT OPENS

There is now brand new playground equipment at Appleby Park! Not to be confused with the new equipment at Appleby Elementary School, the equipment in Appleby Park was purchased and installed by the City last month. The \$100,000 project was funded by the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. These funds filter through the state, then through Riverside County, and are finally used by the City. Up next for Appleby Park will be a brand new restroom! Watch for more exciting improvements in the near future.

April 14, 2011

TODD PARK EXERCISE EQUIPMENT AND NEW SHADE STRUCTURE

If you haven't been by Todd Park recently, take a look at the new exercise equipment installed in March. There are six stations along Broadway and two on Barnard Street. Also new in Todd Park are replacement shade structures covering the existing playground equipment. Come by and get fit!

April 14, 2011

HOBSONWAY BEAUTIFICATION

You have probably noticed the City's Public Works employees sprucing up Hobsonway recently. More specifically, additional decorative rock is being placed in the areas between the sidewalks and the curbs. The north side has been completed as has approximately one-half of the south side.

April 14, 2011

TRANSIT AGENCY PERFORMANCE AUDIT

The Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency (PVVTA) has just received final State Transportation Development Act (TDA) fiscal and performance audits for the triennial period of fiscal year 2006 through 2009 and fiscal year 2009 and 2010.

Independent auditors hired by the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC), Mayer Hoffman McCann P.C., had no findings for the triennial report stating that the Agency "is generally operating in an efficient and effective manner with no specific issues that are in need of improvement".

For the fiscal year 2009/10 report auditors found that the Agency in all respects to financial position conformed to all accounting principles and had no internal deficiencies.

As for the triennial audit report, less than 1% of all transit agencies in the State of California achieve a "no findings" status. The partnership between the City's Transit Agency and Transportation Concepts continues to provide dividends to the city's ridership through high quality service, exemplary performance, and fiscal responsibility!